

Prophet Elias News

News and Views for the Orthodox Church of the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon December 2022

A Sermon for Advent by Father Nicholas Alford

I'm afraid that I have nearly reached the point of changing the radio station when I hear a Christmas Carol and cringing when I hear Christmas hymns while shopping. In Greece some six hundred years before the birth of Christ, Aesop, famous for his fables, noted that "familiarity breeds contempt." Even if I avoid reaching the point of contempt, I need to work against becoming numb to the message. We see this in many areas of our lives as we are constantly bombarded by so many messages. We are not affected by reports of violence in the news, because we hear such reports many times each day. Most of us go through the day to day events of our lives numb or immune to much of what goes on around us. Perhaps this is a somewhat understandable defence mechanism that allows us to continue amidst such violence and greed, suffering and misery. But if we are not very careful this lack of paying attention can go deeper and dull our senses to those around us, to our family and friends, and even blind our awareness of ourselves. For this problem the Church provides the medicine of Advent. Advent is a spiritual wake-up call, a call to pay attention.

St. Paul tells us that "it is high time for us to awake out of sleep." We know that we should be preparing for the coming of Christ every day, throughout the year. But if we are not very careful, the importance of this message becomes blurred, if not lost, amidst the daily hustle and bustle. We know that Christ will come again, but first — I have to make it past this deadline... first — I have to handle this situation... first — I have to deal with this difficult person... first — I have to... And before we know it, it is as if we have fallen asleep and are living in a dream world, a world that is not reality because we have excluded God and people or things that really matter, or pushed them aside while we try to take care of the business at hand. Living in this world of our own invention, we fail to see ourselves as we are; we fail to see others as they are; we fail to see God as He is. At this point we have fallen into sin because we have forgotten God; we have forgotten who we are as His children. The Church calls us to wake up, to return to reality. The Church calls us to frequent self-examination and confession, calling us to remember ourselves and remember God. But again, we often put off this work, thinking "I haven't really done anything that bad…" So a few times a year, the Church calls us with a louder, more persistent call, a call to wake up, pay attention and prepare ourselves, to prepare ourselves to meet God. Advent and Lent are the clearest examples of this call, as we prepare for the great feasts of Christmas and Pascha.

Calling us to wake from sleep, St. Paul urges us on saying that the night is far spent, meaning that the darkness that was life before Christ is past, the day is at hand, meaning that the light of Christ is with us, illuminating all things, revealing all things, filling all things with meaning. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness: the life of rebellion, the self-centred life, the life of deceit and pain – and let us put on the armour of light. Let us put on the life of Christ like a garment, let us clothe ourselves with truth and mercy, understanding, forgiveness and love. This idea of "putting on Christ" is most clear for us in Holy Baptism, as the white robe worn by the new Christian symbolizes the work of putting on the new life, lived in right relationship with God.

But, of course, this is not a simple or instant thing. As we go forward in the Christian life, we need to continue to put on Christ daily. St. Anthony of Egypt warned us to expect temptations till our last breath, and thankfully God does not leave us defenceless, but rather gives us the armour and weapons needed for battle against our enemy, against the evil one and all temptation. We are to arm ourselves with honesty and right living. We are to arm ourselves with prayer and worship, frequent communication with God and communion with God, bringing our concerns and our struggles to God and listening to God, that He may give us guidance and understanding, nourishment and healing. And we are to arm ourselves with fasting, strengthening our spiritual lives by weakening our attachment to things physical, giving order to our

physical existence based on our spiritual priorities. Then when we clean house spiritually, confessing our sins and putting aside harmful things, we need to quickly fill that space with good deeds and spiritual discipline, or we will find that our old habits and harmful passions will soon creep right back into place. We are to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.

Toward the end of St. Matthew's gospel, we encounter Jesus speaking about His second coming, His coming at the end of the age. There Jesus told a parable about ten young women who were waiting for the bridegroom to arrive for the wedding party. The five wise virgins were prepared with oil for their lamps when the bridegroom arrived & were welcomed into the feast; the five foolish virgins were unprepared, caught off guard and were not ready when the bridegroom appeared, so they could not enter. The Church is the Bride of Christ – He is the Bridegroom – a banquet is prepared for all who are ready. We are told, "watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of man is coming." Let us prepare our hearts and souls for the coming of our Redeemer.

Sermon preached by Father Nicholas Alford of Saint Gregory's Orthodox Church, Washington DC on 28th November 2021 <u>A Sermon for the First Sunday of Advent (stgregoryoc.org)</u> Reprinted with permission.

We Grow Accustomed

We grow accustomed to the Dark --When light is put away --As when the Neighbour holds the Lamp To witness her Goodbye --

A Moment -- we uncertain step
For newness of the night -Then -- fit our Vision to the Dark -And meet the Road -- erect --

And so of larger -- Darkness -- Those Evenings of the Brain -- When not a Moon disclose a sign -- Or Star -- come out -- within --

The Bravest -- grope a little --And sometimes hit a Tree Directly in the Forehead --But as they learn to see --

Either the Darkness alters --Or something in the sight Adjusts itself to Midnight --And Life steps almost straight.

Emily Dickinson

O Radiant Dawn

There is a moving YouTube rendering of James MacMillan's Advent anthem 'O Radiant Dawn' made during lockdown by The Sixteen with a worldwide 'Stay at Home Choir' of some 500 singers.

Global Stay at Home Choir from 72 countries - O Radiant Dawn with The Sixteen - YouTube

'O radiant Dawn' (O Oriens) is one of the Great Advent Antiphons – 'The Great Os' - sung in Roman Catholic churches during the last week of Advent.

'O Radiant Dawn, Splendour of eternal Light, Sun of justice: come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. Isaiah prophesied, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone."

Ed.

If Advent is an occasion when I re-turn my eyes to the Saviour, then it is also an invitation to consider where my eyes—and my heart—have been in the meantime.

Jean Michel Hanson







God is in Our Midst A Christmas Sermon by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh

In one of the texts of the Holy Scriptures we are told that the world had waxed old, had decayed in the course of centuries since man had lost touch with God, since communion between God and man had become dimmed. And Saint Paul says that the whole creation is waiting with longing for the revelation of the children of God, for the moment when man will have become Man again in the fullness, in all the beauty of the glory of his vocation.

And on the day when we remember the Nativity of Christ, the Incarnation of the Son of God, we can see that the beginning of a new time has come, that this world that had gone old because God was, as it were, far away from it - great, awe-inspiring but distant - has come to an end. GOD IS IN OUR MIDST: this is the meaning of the word 'Emmanuel'; God with us - and the world is no longer the same. We live in a world into which God has come, in which He is the living power, the inspiration, Life itself, Eternity itself already come. And this is why Saint John the Divine in the Book of the Revelation, speaking of Christ as the End, uses in Greek not the neuter which would be right, but the masculine: because 'The End' is not a moment in time, the End is not something that happens, but Someone that comes.

Yes, we are waiting for the day when God will come in glory, when all history will be over, when all things will be summed up, when God shall be all in all; but already now God is in our midst; already now we have a vision of what man is by vocation and can be by participation. But this is an offer; God gives His love, God gives Himself - not only in the Holy Gifts of Communion, but in all possible ways He is ready to enter into our lives, to fill our hearts, to be enthroned in our minds, to be the will of our will; but to allow Him to do that we must give ourselves to Him, we must respond to love by love, to faith - the faith which God has in us - by faith that is trust and faithfulness to Him. And then - then, we, each of us singly and all of us in our togetherness, will become God's Kingdom come with power, the beginning of the fullness of time, the beginning of the glorious victory!

Isn't that something which is worth struggling for? Isn't it worth turning away from everything that separates us from our own integrity, from one another, from God, and allow ourselves to become new creatures.

Let us now, now that the beginning has come, and in a way the end is already in our midst, let us do it: overcome all that is unworthy of ourselves and allow God victoriously to transfigure our lives! Glory be to God for His love! Glory be to God for the faith He has in us, and for the hope He has put into us! Amen!

This Month We Celebrate

On Friday December 2nd: Saint Porphyrios of Kafsokalyvia (Mount Athos) 1991

On Sunday December 4th: **Great Martyr Barbara** and **Martyr Juliana** (c306) **Saint John of Damascus** (c749)

On Tuesday 6th: Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker Archbishop of Myra in Lycia (c345)

We wish Scott M a Happy Feast and Many Years!

On Wednesday 7th: Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (397)

On Friday 9th: Conception of the Most Holy Mother of God by the Righteous Anna We wish Anna C, and Anna W a Happy Feast and Many Years!

On Sunday December 11th: Sunday of the Holy Forefathers

We wish Mother Sarah, Naomi S, Rachel L and Sally L a Happy Feast and Many Years!

On Monday 12th: Saint Spyridon the Wonderworker Patron Saint of Corfu (c348)

On Tuesday 13th: **Saint Herman of Alaska**, Wonderworker of All America (1837) **Virgin Martyr Lucia (Lucy)** of Syracuse (304)

On Thursday 15th: **Saint Stephen**, Bishop of Sourozh in Crimea (787)

On Saturday 17th: **Prophet Daniel** and the **Three Holy Children** (c600BC)
We wish **Fr Daniel Kaddu** in Uganda, **Daniel L** and **Daniel W**

a Happy Feast and Many Years!

On Sunday 18th: Commemoration of All the Righteous Who Pleased God, from Adam down to Joseph the Betrothed of the Mother of God

We wish Adam R a Happy Feast and Many Years!

On Tuesday 20th: **Hieromartyr Ignatios** of Antioch 'The God-Bearer' (107) Disciple of Saint John the Theologian and friend of Saint Polycarp.

Repose of Saint John of Kronstadt (1908)

On Sunday 25th: THE NATIVITY ACCORDING TO THE FLESH OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST The Adoration of the Magi, **Melchior**, **Caspar and Balthazar**Commemoration of the **Shepherds in Bethlehem** who went to see the Lord.

We wish Christos P and Father Ian and all members of the Parish of the Nativity of Christ in Lewes a Happy Feast and Many Years!

On Monday 26th: Synaxis of the Most Holy Mother of God.

Saint Joseph the Betrothed, David the King, and James the Brother of God.

On Tuesday 27th: **Protomartyr and Deacon Stephen**

On Wednesday 28th: **Apostle Nicanor the Deacon**

We wish Father Nicanor a Happy Feast and Many Years!

On Thursday 29th: **The Holy Innocents,** Infants slain by Herod in Bethlehem **Righteous John the Barefooted,** Fool for Christ's sake (Ukraine, 1849)

Christmas Present for Poetry Lovers?

For anyone who believes that there is an intimate relationship between poetry and matters of faith, Rowan William's anthology 'A Century of Poetry - 100 Poems for Searching the Heart' (SPCK 2022) is a real treasure. In his introduction, Dr Williams says 'I have not looked to include poems that are first and foremost devotional or celebratory, because I have been listening for what I can only call a poetry that invites longer questioning and more sitting-with the tensions and teasings of language about the holy. This allows the inclusion of some pieces written by poets whose personal religious convictions may be opaque or agnostic, unorthodox or semi-detached, but who assume that the world of faith is at the very least a serious dimension of the human imagination, rather than a set of intellectually incoherent and morally obtuse fairy tales.'

Each poem – nearly all of them new to me – is accompanied by a penetrating commentary by Dr Williams, drawing on his long experience both as eminent theologian and acclaimed poet.

'These are deep wells, and Williams is a gentle guide into the depths of riches.' James.Smith - Editor, Image.

Martin Olsson

From Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem

It is Christmas time, a halting of hate time.

On this platform of peace, we can create a language

To translate ourselves to ourselves and to each other.

At this Holy Instant, we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ

Into the great religions of the world.

We jubilate the precious advent of trust.

We shout with glorious tongues at the coming of hope.

All the earth's tribes loosen their voices

To celebrate the promise of Peace.

We, Angels and Mortals, Believers and Non-Believers,

Look heavenward and speak the word aloud.

Peace. We look at our world and speak the word aloud.

Peace. We look at each other, then into ourselves

And we say without shyness or apology or hesitation:

Peace, My Brother.

Peace, My Sister.

Peace, My Soul.

Maya Angelou (2005)

For complete text go to

Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem by Dr. Maya Angelou - Godspacelight

Nativity

Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb,

Now leaves His well-belov'd imprisonment,

There He hath made Himself to His intent

Weak enough, now into the world to come;

But O, for thee, for Him, hath the inn no room?

Yet lay Him in this stall, and from the Orient,

Stars and wise men will travel to prevent

The effect of Herod's jealous general doom.

Seest thou, my soul, with thy faith's eyes, how He

Which fills all place, yet none holds Him, doth lie?

Was not His pity towards thee wondrous high,

That would have need to be pitied by thee?

Kiss Him, and with Him into Egypt go,

With His kind mother, who partakes thy woe.

John Donne

Some Reflections on Prayer

'I loved your full hearted remarks about the recent praying for Dimitrios, the wonder of his recovery, and the mystery of the central importance of insistent and persevering asking God to act, combined with the mystery of the freedom granted to the human person by his Creator. I have learnt over the years that we learn confidence by taking the command to "Ask" seriously, rather than by making clever theological maps of how it all works, (or doesn't). But how lovely to rejoice and give huge thanks for this particular blessing.'

From a recent email from Mother Sarah

'Medieval texts often carry blessings. Typically, scribes included what we call a colophon: a line or two about the production of the manuscript. A colophon might include information about the date of completion, the place of production, or the name of the scribe or illuminator. This 'paratext' is usually found at the end of the document and almost always includes a petition for prayer.

'The colophon in the Cathedral Library's 13th Century Psalter features a sketch of a figure and an arrow pointing to the text:. *Animam scripentis benedicat lingua legentis*. or 'May the tongue of the reader bless the soul of the scribe.' Put simply, the scribe is asking us to bless him. Through this blessing the manuscript reaches back across more than 700 years to connect us in the most profound way to its creator.

'We are not asked to pray for the scribe directly; instead, the act of reading is the prayer, and since Psalms were read daily, our 13th century Psalter offered up a daily prayer for the soul of the scribe. Moreover, it was a communal prayer: in the medieval period manuscripts were read aloud so those listening were also participating in a public blessing of the soul of the scribe. However, perhaps the real power of the blessing in our medieval Psalter is that it works both ways. Prayer is reciprocal: it blesses both the person being prayed for and the person praying.'

Exeter Cathedral News 4-11-2022

News from Uganda

Saint Cyprian's

Since the only contact I have with Father Daniel at Saint Cyprian's is by post, communications tend to be sporadic, but here are extracts from two letters that have reached me in recent weeks:

Dated 15-7-22

Greetings in the name of our merciful Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you for the letter that I got in June.

My family has had a lot of and strong flu [? Covid] We use both types of medicines – the herbal and the usual ones. The government is again advising people to wear masks and to be vaccinated.

Thank the parish from us for the financial contribution which has reached us. Thank for me Madam Irina for her voluntary work [making the Mouse Dolls for sale for St Cyprian's]. May God bless her efforts. Thanks also to the parishioners for their love towards us in all ways.

The breakdown is indicated as follows: [Sterling equivalents approximate]

Fr Daniel parish expenses: 1,200,000 ugx (£275)

Orphans scholastic fees and materials: 2,000,000ugx (£500)

Elderly, sick, disabled: 800,000ugx (£200) Teachers rent: 1,000,000 ugx (£250)

My son who was operated on is now ok: because of you the expenses were not too much for me.

For our new bishops things are not clear yet. Many priests in the Northern region have crossed over the other side [ie to the Moscow Patriarchate. Since the Patriarchate of Alexandria followed Constantinople in recognising the Autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the Moscow Patriarchate has been active in setting up a parallel Orthodox jurisdiction throughout Africa – Ed.]

Dated 4-10-22

I am sorry my communication nowadays is not so good but don't mind I am always keeping you in mind and most important keeping the tie of prayer. Life this way is up and down as to be expected. There are many changes in the church life, but we need to give that some time to continue to observe the situation. The school life has not yet picked up [after Covid] but all the same we are trying to push on. Term I and Term II were okay but Term III is proving harder and harder – payment of teachers for the third month may fail. There is rain however and we are trying to grow as much as we can to balance the life in the future. [Most parishioners are subsistence farmer: if the rains fail, they have to rely on what they have saved . Rainfall has become much more erratic in recent years.]

Saint Cyprian day celebration was completed. The new Archbishop was to visit us but he failed.

Greet Maama Celia, the priests, parishioners and well wishers that we love them all. Fr Daniel

Dr Dimitrios

Many of you contacted us when Dimitrios contracted Ebola in September to assure us of your prayers for his recovery. For several days his life was in the balance, but we thank God that he turned the corner and has returned to his internship at Mubende Regional Hospital, albeit having to be careful to take time out when he needs it. It will be some time before we know if any of the after-effects of this horrible disease are going to be long term.

During his convalescence Dimitrios wrote:

Thank everyone for praying because it was the only thing that saved my life because even talking with Doctors after getting better they told me that they never expected me to survive. I don't know how much to thank you but am very grateful.

Martin Olsson

A Visit to St Nicholas' Cathedral, Kampala

Stephen Elliott, a member of Great Walsingham Parish, reports on his recent visit to Uganda

I work for the UK Government and over the last two months I have been required to go out to Uganda twice. Once in August and once in October. I travel fairly regularly and when I am given a new assignment I always take the time to establish if there is an Orthodox Community nearby. (In April 22 I was lucky enough to attend an Antiochian Holy Liturgy in Sydney, Australia.) Upon receiving news of my Uganda trip I began to search online to see if Orthodoxy was present there. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that the country is positively teeming with Orthodoxy of one variety or another.

My first trip to Uganda in August was extremely hectic but during my second trip I had identified that I would have a free day on Sunday the 23rd of October. This would be the day I attended a Holy Liturgy somewhere in Kampala. Whilst at my hotel on Saturday evening I began searching online for a Parish that wasn't too far away and that conducted a service in English. This was no mean feat but in the end I decided on St Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral in Namungoona due to its relative close proximity to my hotel. (20/25 mins by car) Unfortunately the Parish website did not list the timings of the Services so I decided to go down at approx

09:30 and try my luck. I called a taxi at the hotel and headed out into the moderate Sunday morning traffic in the capital. The weather was warm and the sun was shining and although a Sunday morning the city was full of life. As we approached the Namungoona district we headed into a relatively poor area which snaked its way onto a badly maintained dirt road before signs for the Orthodox Cathedral began to lead the way. The St Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral is a compound of some 6.5 acres which includes the Cathedral, an Orthodox Mission Hospital, and an Orthodox School.

Upon arrival the Holy Liturgy was in full flow and almost everything felt familiar with a few obvious differences. The service was being conducted in the language of Luganda but I was still able to identify the that the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom was being used. Other notable differences were an Organ accompanying the Choir and the Congregation seated in Pews. Aside of this I felt very much at home as I venerated the ikons and lit candles whilst in Prayer.

At the end of the Service I met some of the Parishioners who were very welcoming and who introduced me to the Parish Priest, Father Nicholas Bayego. After a brief chat I bid goodbye to my new friends and travelled back to my hotel. A few hours later I received a message from Metropolitan Jeronymos of Kampala and all Uganda inviting me to tea the next evening at his residence. The next evening I spent a very special time with his Eminence and the Bishop of Gulu, His Grace Nektarios Kabuye. At the end of the meeting His Eminence gifted me with two beautiful Ikons which now take pride of place in my home office.

All in all it was a very memorable experience and wonderful to see that Orthodoxy is continuing to thrive all over the world. Should anyone need advice regarding travelling to Uganda or Orthodoxy in Kampala feel free to get in touch. I have contact details for the Parish in Namungoona.

Stephen Elliott

Deanery Assembly

As a reminder or for those that do not know, each Parish of the Deanery elects a number of lay representatives each year to attend the Deanery Assemblies in addition to the clergy that also go. I have been an alternate (that is the person who attends the meetings in the event that one of the representatives cannot) for a number of years but had only been once previously. This year neither of the Parish lay representatives (Celia Olsson and Ed Skidelsky) were able to attend so since I was able to, I went to the Deanery Assembly which was held in London on Saturday 15th October, travelling in the company of Deacon Brandon who also attended the clergy meeting the evening before as well as the meeting itself.

This date coincided with what would have been Fr Peter's 80 birthday so it felt good to see and reconnect with clergy and lay reps whom I hadn't seen since my last visit (before 2020) and who I know Papa was so fond of and enjoyed spending time with. The business of the meeting lasted less than two hours and there was time to talk to other delegates at the end when lunch was provided. It was good to see old friends and to talk to people I hadn't had the opportunity to speak with before.

Archbishop Nikitas welcomed all and spoke of his participation as the only Orthodox hierarch at HM Queen Elizabeth's funeral. He also spoke of the ongoing process of introducing more English into services in parishes of the Archdiocese and providing both clergy and laity with increased educational/training opportunities. He also spoke of the assistance provided to Ukrainian refugees and the work done by some parishes in helping local communities to cope with the cost-of-living crisis in the form of foodbanks.

A number of decisions and announcements were made. It was agreed that all Parishes should have two lay representatives (previously the number of lay representatives was proportionate to the number of clergy in each Parish) thereby streamlining the process. It was also agreed that each Community (as distinct from Parish) representative has the right to vote: until this point they only had the right to observe/comment. A new safeguarding policy has been accepted and will be distributed to Parishes in by the Archdiocesan office.

The Deanery conference will take place next year but will be a day shorter as a new venue had to be booked at short notice. However, it was felt that the conference should go ahead nonetheless, starting as usual on the Friday but ending on Sunday morning. More information on dates and venue (which is near Derby) will be sent to Parishes in due course. [Full details in the January newsletter.]

I was very pleased to have had the opportunity to go and indeed it was very timely as Celia Olsson (having served faithfully as lay rep for many years) decided to stand down at our recent AGM. I was asked if I would be happy to be nominated which I was having had the recent experience and seen the importance and value of attending these meetings for myself. I look forward to attending the next one which is next October.

Noticeboard

Services:

Saturday December 3rd: Vespers St Anne's 6pm

Sunday 4th: Divine Liturgy (with Father Alexander) St Anne's 10.30am

Saturday 10th: Vespers St Anne's 6pm Sunday 11th: Typika St Anne's 10.30am Saturday 17th: Vespers St Anne's 6pm Sunday 18th: Typika St Anne's 10.30am

Saturday 24th: Orthros and Divine Liturgy for Christmas Eve Torquay 9.30am

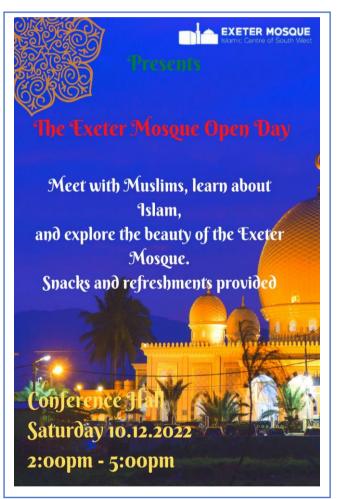
Vespers St Anne's 6pm

Sunday 25th: Divine Liturgy in celebration of the Nativity of Christ St Anne's 10.30am

Saturday 31st: Divine Liturgy Combe Martin 10.30am

Sunday January 1st: Divine Liturgy and Vasilopita Plymouth 10am Torquay 10am





Welcome

We are very happy to report the reception by chrismation of David Wright before the Liturgy at Saint Anne's on November 26th, sponsored by Deacon Brandon. David is currently studying for an MA in History at Exeter University.

May God may grant him Many Years!

Contributions for the January issue should reach the Editors at martinolsson827@btinternet.com or by post at Little Linhay, Bondleigh, EX20 2AJ by Monday 19th December, please.

Any opinions expressed in this newsletter are entirely those of the named authors or identified sources and should not be taken as representing the views of the parish as a whole.